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# Jim Williams Speaks on Entrepreneurship at Emanuel Women's Facility

January 22, 2012



(Left to right) Deputy Warden Janette Nihles, Jim Williams, Warden Alexis Chase

Jim Williams recently visited the Emanuel Women's Facility in Swainsboro, Ga. on Jan. 10 speaking with over 50 women about entrepreneurship opportunities and their challenges in the work force once they are released. Williams is Chairman of the Georgia Southern University College of Business Administration's Center for Entrepreneurial Learning and Leadership Advisory Council.

Williams first became interested in the facility when he heard Warden Alexis E. L. Chase speaking at a Rotary Club meeting of entrepreneurship at the facility. Immediately, Williams became interested and wanted to find out more.

*"I was surprised about entrepreneurship going on at a correction facility,"* said Williams. After arranging a time for his visit, Williams prepared himself for an *"eye-opening"* experience.

The Emanuel Women's Facility is a medium security female prison that opened March 21 of last year. The women housed there have eight or fewer years left to serve on their sentence. Warden Chase explained a number of women located at the facility have a *"high caliber of academic standing"* including those with college degrees and even PhDs. After realizing so many women held this type of education, Chase along with her management team decided to have them teach academic classes to other women in the facility.

*"I have 14 classes that have been going on since September 2011 including investing, global perspectives and entrepreneurship,"* said Chase.

Williams was able to visit with the entrepreneurship class. He found they all had one thing in common- the desire for employment once released. *"After Deputy Warden Janette Nihles introduced me, I started our conversation by asking if anyone was an entrepreneur, and many of them raised their hands,"* said Williams. *"But I joked that I was referring to legal-only entrepreneurial activities which brought a big laugh."*



Williams explained the women were indeed aware of the image they would be dealing with when re-entering the workforce. As the conversation continued many women began to describe what type of businesses they were involved in before their conviction. According to Williams, there were cleaning, hair care, construction, technology, and even solar power green related businesses.

*"Then we went over a couple of points I wanted to make sure we discussed that I reference in my [Georgia Southern entrepreneurship] classes," said Williams. "We discussed the 10 attributes needed to be a successful entrepreneur and examined if they had each, or ways to partner for success."* There was one woman who spoke of starting an employment business that only placed convicted felons. Knowing the difficult road ahead when being released, she was inspired to help fellow convicted felons with the process in the future.

Williams explained she would have to work harder in establishing credibility than another start-up employment business, but her idea was indeed possible. The key to not only her success, but all the



other women's success was emphasizing that they are survivors. *"That is what get them through to the next level,"* said Williams. will

Chase described the women as being *"enthusiastic, welcoming and interested"* in what Williams had to offer. According to Chase, the women felt Williams words were of great value and could be applied to their lives. *"The visit did not just benefit the ladies, it empowered them,"* said Chase. *"It empowered them to pursue entrepreneurship aspects when they get out."*

Williams, along with Dr. Luke Pittaway, the Director of the Center for Entrepreneurial Learning and Leadership; and the William A. Freeman Distinguished Chair in Free Enterprise; are planning on responding to a list of approved questions from the women of the facility. Then Williams and Dr. Pittaway will determine ways The Center and the various student entrepreneurship programs can help these women in the future. Afterwards Dr. Ervin Williams, esteemed colleague of Jim Williams' and Chairman of The Business Accelerator™ will both see what other needs of the women can be met. They will do this by using this internet business and social networking company established to accelerate the development, funding, and growth of unique, network-design ventures and the commercialization of inventions and creative business ideas.

*"Overall, it was very rewarding as well as a great learning experience to see the programs put into place by Warden Chase within the facility. It is going to be their survival instincts and their hunger for achievement which is great motivation and passion of being committed to help them succeed,"* said Williams.

